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INFRASTRUCTURE SPOTLIGHT: CANADA'S HIGHWAY SYSTEM: BACKBONE OF A STRONG ECONOMY

Canada is a vast country with many of its cities, people and economic centres separated by great distances. To support our country's modern trade-dependent economy, as well as its development, economic growth and well-being, transportation – especially roads and highways – plays a critical role.

Every day, millions of Canadians travel on highways. Our highway system, which is connected to major urban centres and international gateways, enables Canadian businesses to efficiently reach domestic and foreign markets.

Supporting trade competitiveness and a strong Canadian economy

A modern, safe and interconnected system of highways promotes trade competitiveness and is essential for the efficient movement of commercial goods within Canada and across international borders. Given the importance of our trade relationship with the United States and the fact that most Canada-US trade is conducted by commercial truckers, our highway network is the backbone of a strong Canadian economy.

Indeed, roads continue to be the dominant mode of transport for the movement of goods between Canada and the United States. In 2011, $149 billion worth of exports and $162 billion worth of imports were transported by road between the two countries.[1] This represents 56 percent of total Canada-U.S. trade and 35 percent of Canada's total trade worldwide.

The evolution of Canada's highways

An important part of the country's extensive road system, the historic Trans-Canada Highway, was built in the 1950s to strengthen national unity and help connect Canadians from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The 1949 *Trans-Canada Highway Act* set the stage for joint federal-provincial funding of what would become Canada's longest highway. Workers tackled some of the world's most treacherous terrain, including mountain passes, canyons, and frozen prairies to build the 8,030-kilometre route.

Building the Trans-Canada Highway in Saskatchewan, ca. 1957
(photo courtesy of the Encyclopaedia of Saskatchewan Archives Board R-B6300)

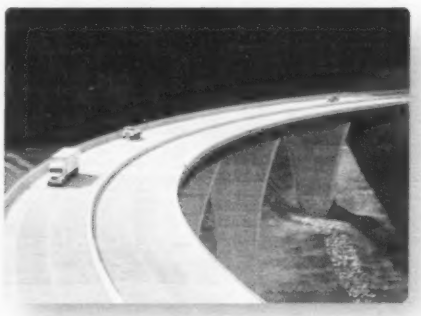
In 1962, Prime Minister John Diefenbaker and provincial representatives officially opened the Trans-Canada at Rogers Pass in British Columbia. While construction would not be fully competed until 1971, Canada's "billion dollar highway" was open for traffic from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Over the years it has seen many upgrades, such as improvements to the Kicking Horse Canyon Highway project (see below). Since 1971, some

[1] Information provided by Transport Canada (May 2012).

provinces have designated additional and parallel road links as part of the Trans-Canada Highway even though they were not built under the original 1949 Act. The Trans-Canada Highway, as designated by the provinces, now stands at around 12,800 kilometres.

Improving the Trans-Canada Highway, Golden, British Columbia

The Kicking Horse Canyon Highway Improvement project involved straightening the Trans-Canada Highway, widening it to four lanes, replacing bridges, and implementing other design innovations to reduce hazards. With the help of over $64 million from the Major Infrastructure Component of the Building Canada Fund, the improvements reduced sharp curves and steep grades while increasing capacity and improving traffic flow. The upgrades improved the safety and efficiency of this critical trade corridor, which is travelled by more than 10,000 vehicles every day in the summer.



The Park Bridge across the Kicking Horse River is a spectacular feat of engineering nestled into the even more spectacular Rocky Mountains.
(photos courtesy of the Government of British Columbia)

Since the debut of the Trans-Canada Highway, continued investments in Canada's roads and highways have greatly expanded the country's road system. Canada has over one million kilometres of roads[2], including an interconnected system of national highways, which represent the core of the national transportation network used by cars, trucks and buses.

In 1988, the Council of Ministers Responsible for Transportation and Highway Safety formally endorsed a National Highway System (NHS). The NHS includes over 38,000 kilometres of highways that support inter-provincial and international trade and travel by connecting the country's capital cities, major population or commercial centres, major ports of exit or entry to the United States, as well as other transportation facilities, such as ports and ferry terminals. In 2008, the system supported over 127 billion vehicle-kilometres of travel, including nearly 20 billion vehicle-kilometres of truck travel.[3] While the NHS represents only three percent of the road network in Canada, it accounted for over 39 percent of vehicle-kilometres travelled in 2008.[4]

Canada's National Highway System
(photo courtesy of Transport Canada)

[2] As measured in "two-lane equivalent" roads.
[3] Information provided by Transport Canada (May 2012).
[4] *Ibid.*

The Trans-Labrador Highway, Newfoundland and Labrador

The movement of people and goods enhances Canadian society and as such, transportation infrastructure is a priority area of investment for the governments of Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Trans-Labrador Highway cuts through the northern Labrador wilderness, connecting the west to the east of this vast land in a way never seen by previous generations.

Phase I began in 2007 and involves the widening and hard surfacing of the highway between Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Labrador City-Wabush. Phase I is expected to cost approximately $300 million, including $100 million cost-shared by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Government of Canada under the Provincial-Territorial Base Fund.

(photos courtesy of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador)

Our highway system is a central component of Canada's multi-modal transportation infrastructure. Most freight transported by train, ship or aircraft rely on trucks at one or both ends of the trip. In 2007, the Government of Canada launched the National Policy Framework for Strategic Gateways and Trade Corridors to facilitate trade and commerce, provide a seamless and integrated transportation network, and respond to pressures related to globalization and competitiveness.

Container loading on a trailer
(photo courtesy of the Government of British Columbia)

The strategies developed and implemented under this Framework contribute to Canada's competitiveness by further developing and leveraging transportation systems, including roads and highways, which are critical to international trade. Three strategic gateways and trade corridors have been identified: the Asia-Pacific Gateway and Corridor, the Ontario-Quebec Continental Gateway and Trade Corridor, and the Atlantic Gateway and Trade Corridor.

Government of Canada support for better highways

The Government of Canada recognizes the importance of an efficient, integrated highway system to Canada's economy and long-term prosperity. Although provinces and territories are responsible for most highway construction, federal investments have helped ensure that our highways support Canada's economic prosperity.

The Government of Canada supports highway improvement in different ways. Through Infrastructure Canada programs such as the Building Canada Fund, federal investments support projects that improve the capacity and safety of core National Highway System routes, rehabilitate highway and bridge assets and provide Intelligent Transportation Systems. Under the Major Infrastructure Component of the Building Canada Fund, the core National Highway System is one of five national priorities, along with public transit, drinking water, wastewater and green energy infrastructure.

Since the launch of the Building Canada Plan in 2007, Infrastructure Canada has committed over $1.6 billion towards 241 National Highway System infrastructure projects[5]. This includes significant investments in some of Canada's largest economic regions. These federal investments leveraged about $2.3 billion from the other levels of government towards the improvement of the National Highway System.

Stimulus funding supports highway improvements in New Brunswick

In New Brunswick, Infrastructure Stimulus Fund investments have supported projects that have helped improve the everyday lives of citizens. Among these, 46 highway improvement projects received a total federal contribution of over $35 million. Now completed, these construction projects have resulted in a smoother drive and improved safety and reliability for New Brunswick motorists and their families.

Highway construction and rehabilitation of Routes 101, 102, and 109, Fredericton and Perth-Andover

New interchange is helping local business grow, Moncton

Important bridge gets much-needed upgrades, Hartland

[5] This includes projects funded under the Building Canada Fund and the Infrastructure Stimulus Fund.

To strengthen Canada's position in international commerce, the Government of Canada is also making significant investments under Transport Canada programs such as the Asia-Pacific Gateway and Corridor Initiative and the Gateways and Border Crossings Fund. Guided by the National Policy Framework for Strategic Gateways and Trade Corridors, the goal of these investments is to advance the Canadian transportation system to better connect our nation with world markets. The Government of Canada has committed over $432 million towards National Highway System projects under these funds, leveraging an additional $573 million from partners.[6]

Strategic highway infrastructure project supports trade with Asia-Pacific markets, Lower Mainland, British Columbia

Major bridge and highway improvements are helping move international goods more quickly and efficiently through the Lower Mainland (British Columbia) and into markets across Canada and the United States.

The Pitt River Bridge and Mary Hill Interchange Project includes a new seven-lane bridge and an interchange to replace the current Lougheed Highway and Mary Hill Bypass intersection. Now open, the new bridge helps to better connect trade-related and transportation facilities on both sides of the Pitt River. The project's design also includes pedestrian amenities and bicycle lanes.

The Government of Canada is supporting this project through $90 million provided under the Asia-Pacific Gateway and Corridor Initiative.

(photo courtesy of the Government of British Columbia)

Delivering Results

Significant joint, public investments made in recent years have helped to improve road safety, increase efficiencies, and rejuvenate Canada's highway network.

For example, studies have shown that the average age of roads in Canada is significantly lower than a decade ago, from 17 years in 2000 to 13 years in 2010.[7] Since 2006, investments by all orders of government in the National Highway System have improved no less than 2,600 kilometres of the network (or 12 percent of its total length), upgrading their pavement condition rating to "good".[8] In addition, 700 of the 8,700 bridges that are part of the National Highway System are new or have undergone major rehabilitation since 2007.[9]

Canadian highways and roads are also safer today than they were decades ago. Despite more drivers than ever before, the number of fatalities and collisions on Canadian roads is declining

[6] In addition, $167 million in federal funding has been invested through Parks Canada for the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway in Banff National Park, Alberta.

7 Statistics Canada, Investment and Capital Stock Division.

[8] Council of Ministers Responsible for Transportation and Highway Safety, "Canada's National Highway System – Annual Report 2010", p.5, September 2011.

[9] *Ibid.*

steadily, due to better driving behaviour, increased awareness and better and safer infrastructure.[10] Recent numbers confirm long-term trends and gains observed since the beginning of the 1990s. From 2007 to 2009, Canadian authorities recorded a decrease of 20 percent (from 2,761 to 2,209) in road collision fatalities, their lowest level in almost six decades.[11]

Looking Forward

The Government of Canada will continue to partner with the other levels of government and key stakeholders to ensure that Canada's highways continue to serve Canadians and contribute to our economic growth, prosperity and competitiveness.

In Budget 2011 and Canada's Economic Action Plan 2012, the Government of Canada committed to working with provinces, territories, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and other stakeholders to develop a long-term plan for public infrastructure that extends beyond the expiry of the Building Canada Plan in 2014. In November 2011, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities launched an engagement process for the development of the new plan. The continued need for improvement of Canada's highway system is being considered in this context.

For additional information about the Government of Canada's engagement process to develop a long-term infrastructure plan, visit: http://www.infrastructure.gc.ca/plan/plan-eng.html.

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[10] Canadian Council for Motor Transport Administrators, News Release, November 2011, http://www.ccmta.ca/english/producstandservices/news_releases/ndr_2011.pdf.
[11] Transport Canada, 2011, "Canadian Motor Vehicle Traffic Collision Statistics: 2009", http://www.tc.gc.ca/eng/roadsafety/tp-tp3322-2009-1173.html.